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Local Coach Collects 300 Soccer Balls for Soldier's Charitable Efforts in Iraq Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy to Present Balls to Serviceman's Father this Wednesday

JERSEY CITY – When soccer coach Alex Lalaoui heard that a Jersey City father was trying to collect soccer balls for needy children living near his son's Army Unit in Iraq, he knew he had to take action.

Lalaoui, a 34 year-old father of two, and owner of The Soccer Learning Center, a private soccer academy in Jersey City, remembered what it was like growing up too poor to afford a soccer ball of his own in his native Morocco. He would often make homemade balls out of discarded bleach bottles or even plastic bags stuffed round with paper scraps.

Lalaoui had read of Jack Burns efforts on behalf on his son, Army Specialist Jon Burns, in an online news forum two weeks ago. Within days, the energetic coach was rallying the help of his players, their families, community agencies and sports teams like the New Jersey Ironmen.

Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy even jumped on board and donated ten soccer balls and established a donation site at City Hall. "When I heard that Coach Lalaoui was collecting balls for one of our city's bravest sons, I just had to help," said **Mayor Healy**. "Imagine what these kids are going through everyday. These soldiers understand what a soccer ball can do to help spread a bit of joy and that's just amazing."

Jersey City Police Detective and Woodbridge soccer coach Joseph Shaw also partnered up with Lalaoui to help spur the drive.

The balls will be presented to Jack Burns at a special ceremony hosted by Mayor Healy at Jersey City City Hall on Grove Street this Wednesday, November 12, 2008 at 4:15 p.m. Lalaoui projects that close to 300 soccer balls will be collected during the 12-day campaign. The balls will be sent to Jon Burns' Army unit in Iraq where they will be distributed by soldiers to area children.

"Soccer is as important a national pastime in Iraq as baseball is in America," explained Lalaoui. "I know what it's like growing up not being able to afford something as simple as a soccer ball," he continued. "Who knows, maybe one of our balls will help launch a future World Cup superstar.

Major supporters of the campaign include: Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy; JCPD Detective Joseph Shaw; HALEA; PACO; Jersey City Lodge 4 of the Fraternal Order of Police; The Jersey City Bounty Hunters Football team; New York Red Bulls; New Jersey Ironmen; Paul Silverman; Leslie Bobb; The Weather Channel; Bayonne Soccer Association; Jersey City Fire Department; and New Jersey City University Soccer Coach Cris da Silva.

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